

AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

The listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application.

1. (Previously Presented) A fixing apparatus comprising:

a heating medium that heat-fixes an unfixed image onto a recording medium;

a heater that heats said heating medium; and

a sheet separation guide plate having a guide surface that guides a heat-fixing surface of said recording medium, on which said unfixed image has been heat-fixed and which is transported along a predetermined sheet path, in a direction of separation from said heating medium;

wherein said guide surface of said sheet separation guide plate comprises a step part raised along a guide width direction of said guide surface,

wherein said step part comprises a plurality of projecting parts, provided in a guide width direction, and a recess between said projecting parts, and

wherein, comparing a downstream projecting part, located on a sheet transportation direction downstream side, with an upstream projecting part located on a sheet transportation direction upstream side, said downstream projecting part is located so that an apex thereof is positioned further toward said heater than a peripheral surface of said heating medium.

2-3. (Canceled)

4. (Previously Presented) The fixing apparatus according to claim 1, wherein a sheet transportation path forming member, provided on said sheet transportation direction downstream side of said sheet separation guide plate, causes said recording medium, separated from said

heating medium and guided by said guide surface of said sheet separation guide plate, to curve toward said heat-fixing surface side of said recording medium.

5. (Previously Presented) The fixing apparatus according to claim 1, wherein heights of both guide width direction end portions of said step part provided on said guide surface of said sheet separation guide plate are greater than a height of a guide width direction center portion of said step part.

6. (Previously Presented) The fixing apparatus according to claim 1, wherein a guide width direction center edge opposite said heating medium of said guide surface of said sheet separation guide plate projects toward the sheet transportation direction upstream side more than both guide width direction end portions of said guide surface.

7. (Previously Presented) The fixing apparatus according to claim 1, wherein said guide surface of said sheet separation guide plate includes low-friction material.

8. (Previously Presented) The fixing apparatus according to claim 1, wherein said sheet separation guide plate comprises a metal plate.

9. (Previously Presented) An image forming apparatus comprising:  
an image forming section that forms an unfixed image on a recording medium; and  
a fixing section that heat-fixes an unfixed image formed on said recording medium by said image forming section by a heated heating medium;

wherein the fixing apparatus according to claim 1 comprises said fixing section.

10. (Currently Amended) A fixing apparatus comprising:

a heating medium that heat-fixes an unfixed image onto a recording medium;  
a heater that heats said heating medium; and

a sheet separation guide plate having a guide surface that guides a heat-fixing surface of the recording medium, on which the unfixed image has been heat-fixed and which is transported along a predetermined sheet path, in a direction of separation from the heating medium;

wherein the guide surface of the sheet separation guide plate comprises a step part raised along a guide width direction of the guide surface, and

wherein ~~the sheet separation guide plate comprises~~ a sheet transportation path forming member, provided on the sheet transportation direction downstream side of the sheet separation guide plate, that causes the recording medium, separated from the heating medium and guided by the guide surface of the sheet separation guide plate, to curve toward the heat-fixing surface side of the recording medium.

11. (Previously Presented) The fixing apparatus according to claim 10, wherein heights of both guide width direction end portions of the step part provided on the guide surface of the sheet separation guide plate are greater than a height of a guide width direction center portion of the step part.

12. (Previously Presented) The fixing apparatus according to claim 10, wherein a guide width direction center edge opposite the heating medium of the guide surface of the sheet separation guide plate projects toward a sheet transportation direction upstream side more than both guide width direction end portions of the guide surface.

13. (Previously Presented) The fixing apparatus according to claim 10, wherein the guide surface of the sheet separation guide plate includes low-friction material.

14. (Previously Presented) The fixing apparatus according to claim 10, wherein the sheet separation guide plate comprises a metal plate.

15. (Previously Presented) An image forming apparatus comprising:

an image forming section that forms an unfixed image on a recording medium; and  
a fixing section that heat-fixes an unfixed image formed on the recording medium by the  
image forming section by a heated heating medium;

wherein the fixing apparatus according to claim 10 comprises the fixing section.

16. (Previously Presented) A fixing apparatus comprising:

a heating medium that heat-fixes an unfixed image onto a recording medium;

a heater that heats said heating medium; and

a sheet separation guide plate having a guide surface that guides a heat-fixing surface of  
the recording medium, on which the unfixed image has been heat-fixed and which is transported  
along a predetermined sheet path, in a direction of separation from the heating medium;

wherein the guide surface of the sheet separation guide plate comprises a step part raised  
along a guide width direction of the guide surface, and

wherein heights of both guide width direction end portions of the step part provided on  
the guide surface of the sheet separation guide plate are greater than a height of a guide width  
direction center portion of the step part.

17. (Previously Presented) The fixing apparatus according to claim 16, wherein a guide  
width direction center edge opposite the heating medium of the guide surface of the sheet  
separation guide plate projects toward a sheet transportation direction upstream side more than  
both guide width direction end portions of the guide surface.

18. (Previously Presented) The fixing apparatus according to claim 16, wherein the  
guide surface of the sheet separation guide plate includes low-friction material.

19. (Previously Presented) The fixing apparatus according to claim 16, wherein the  
sheet separation guide plate comprises a metal plate.

20. (Previously Presented) An image forming apparatus comprising:  
an image forming section that forms an unfixed image on a recording medium; and  
a fixing section that heat-fixes an unfixed image formed on the recording medium by the  
image forming section by a heated heating medium;  
wherein the fixing apparatus according to claim 16 comprises the fixing section.